

## NOLAN DID TRY TO REDIRECT THE LIGHT BRIGADE

by Dr Douglas J Austin      05      [ TWC 23(4) p20 2006 ]

This article is based on extracts from two of FM Sir Evelyn Wood's books [1] and [2]. They relate to vigorous discussions of Morris, Nolan and the Charge of the Light Brigade in the Yahoo Crimean War Group (<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/CrimeanWar/>). One hypothesis is that Nolan was given verbal orders by Raglan and Airey, supplementary to the fatal and deeply ambiguous written 4th Order, which sent the Light Brigade to its destruction - and glory - down the North Valley. Nolan may have delivered such verbal orders (if any) to Lucan, who may have passed them on to Cardigan. No resolution is possible at present.

With valued advice from David Kelsey and Rod Robinson, I judge that these extracts show that Wood heard many first-hand accounts of the Charge of the Light Brigade at Balaklava. For more than three months, Wood shared a bungalow with Morris in India in 1858 and Morris fully confirmed his own efforts to follow up the success of the Charge of the Heavy Brigade. They also confirm the view, expressed in Paget's book [3], that Cardigan considered that the second line of the Light Brigade was NOT under his command. This accounts for Cardigan's demanding Lord George Paget's "best support" and suggests that Cardigan was "right" to turn back from the Russian guns when "his" first line disappeared from sight.

Nolan joined Morris in front of the 17th Lancers just before the Charge of the Light Brigade. Wood's statement that "Shortly after it advanced, Captain Nolan was seen galloping across the front, shouting, and pointing to the Causeway Heights with his sword" may NOT be a direct quote from Morris, who died at Poona on 11th July, 1858. It is clear, however, that Morris and Wood's other informants stated no conflicting memory of the incident.

The forthcoming book, "The Pocket Hercules" by Mei Trow [4] is based on Morris' letters, written to his wife and other family members. These wholly unexpected and very welcome documents may (perhaps) resolve some of the issues. Mr Trow has informed me, however, that "The Morris papers shed little light ... on the controversial nature of the war; he was no outspoken maverick like Nolan and was of a much more understanding and forgiving nature, remembering always that he had ambitions to rise in the service; criticism of his superiors would make this impossible."

### [I] [a] p.1 18: "CHAPTER XI : 1858 - CENTRAL INDIA.

"...We made a fair passage of forty-two days to Cape Town, where our spirits fell on hearing Dihli [Delhi] had fallen, and the confident predictions that the Mutiny would be suppressed before the ship reached Bombay, where we disembarked on the 21st December [1857]. I was left on board to hand over the equipment used by the Regiment. The men worked well, and we got the hammocks, blankets, etc., handed in before the last train left for the foot of the Ghaut, under Khandala, which was then the terminus. There I was again detailed to stay behind, to resort baggage; but I caught the Regiment up in its next day's march, and with it arrived at Kirki. The house accommodation of the Station, built for a battery of Horse Artillery and a Cavalry Regiment, was insufficient, as there was already two-thirds of a Cavalry regiment in possession. The two Majors, Learmouth and Lieutenant-Colonel Morris, were kind enough to take me into a bungalow which they hired, where I had a bed and bath room for a nominal sum, my brother-Subalterns having for a time to live in tents."

### [I] [b]: p. 120:

"...At the end of March, when the mail came in, I heard that the efforts which Admiral Lord Lyons had been making in my behalf to obtain reconsideration of Sir Stephen Lushington's

recommendation for the Victoria Cross were fruitless. Colonel Morris, of whom I had seen a great deal from living in the same house, and from the fact that I read to him for an hour daily, translating as I went, a book by Colonel de Brack on Light Cavalry [5], noticed that I was depressed, and asked me the reason. After condoling with me, he invited me to come out into the garden, as he had just received a sword, made by Messrs. Wilkinson of Pall Mall, designed on the model of a sword used effectively by Colonel Clarke of the Scots Greys at Waterloo; but Colonel Morris, who was the Champion swordsman in the Army, believing in the advantage of a light weapon, had ordered his sword to be made lighter, which Messrs. Wilkinson did, but declined responsibility, fearing that if struck by another sword it might break. Morris was a very powerful man although short, being 43 inches round the chest, and was known in the Cavalry as the “Pocket Hercules”. He struck the trunk of a mimosa tree with the sword three times with as much force as he was capable of exerting, and then having examined it, handed it to me, saying, “You may trust your life to it,” and utterly refused to allow me to decline the present.”

[2] [a]: pp. 112-113:

“Behind the Brigadier sat an officer in command of the 17th Lancers, Captain Morris, who had seen much service in India. He was short in stature but powerfully made, being 43 inches around the chest, and was affectionately termed by his brother officers “The Pocket Hercules.” During the Punjab campaign, while yet a youthful comet, he engaged in single combat a horseman who, careering in front, challenged the 16th Lancers, and, in an exciting struggle, killed the man. After Morris’s service in India he passed through the Staff College (Senior Department) and there was no Cavalry Officer on the ground with wider experience.

I went to India with him in 1857, and kept house for him for several months, and he often told me that he repeatedly urged the Brigadier to attack the rear of the Russian mass as soon as it was committed to a fight with our Heavy Brigade; and on his declining to do so, begged that the two squadrons of the 17th Lancers, then under his command, might be permitted to fall on the rear of the wavering mass. It is true that Lord Cardigan denied that any such request had been made, but I am satisfied that he was mistaken, and honestly, for, although not popular, he was never accused of wilful mis-statements. Moreover, Morris put it officially on record at the time in a letter to the Adjutant-General. Morris’s evidence is the more convincing because, when many were disparaging his Brigadier for having, as they asserted, retired prematurely from the struggle in the Northern Valley, Morris, who was well qualified to judge, emphatically asserted that “he led like a gentleman.””

[2] [b]: p.115:

“Although I did not see the Light brigade charge, of which no Briton can think without a quickened feeling in his heart, yet having enjoyed exceptional opportunities of associating with some of the most prominent actors in that dramatic scene, I venture to suggest that the chivalrous errors, which, if they did not induce the charge, yet contributed to the heavy loss, cannot justly be attributed to only one or two men. The two leading regiments in the charge were the 13th Light Dragoons and the 17th Lancers. I joined the former before the end of the war, and the latter in the time of the Sepoy Mutiny, and thus had many opportunities of hearing at first hand not only of the incidents of that glorious half- hour, but also of the events of the previous six months.”

[2] [c] : pp. 117-118:

“As Mr Kinglake justly observes, whichever way Captain Nolan pointed, the difference in the angle from the captured English guns on the Causeway Heights, which Lord Raglan thought the Russians were about to remove, and the Battery of Russian guns in the Northern valley, behind which the defeated Russian cavalry had retreated, and were then standing, was only twenty degrees. A fuller consideration of the order would have shown a more experienced commander that Lord Raglan could not have intended the Cavalry brigade to go down the Northern valley, since the previous

instructions, to which I have referred, ran thus: "Cavalry to advance and take advantage of any opportunity to recover the heights;" but our Cavalry leaders were unused to war, and its attendant difficult problems. When Lord Lucan rode across the Causeway Heights, to where his Brigadier then sat looking down the Northern valley, and imparted to him the order, there arose a further misunderstanding, for Lord Cardigan considered that his command in the charge was to be limited to the 13th Light Dragoons and 17th Lancers. This view was not altogether unreasonable, for the Divisional General, against the Brigadier's will, moved back the 11th Hussars into the second line. The formation in which the five regiments, consisting of ten and a half squadrons (the 8th Hussars had a half squadron at Head Quarters) moved down the valley, was as follows:- 1st line, 13th Light Dragoons, 17th Lancers; 2nd line, 11th Hussars, 4th Light Dragoons, the latter being at first some way behind but were intended to come up alongside the 11th Hussars. The 8th Hussars were in 3rd line.

The brigade moved forward at the trot. Shortly after it advanced, Captain Nolan was seen galloping across the front, shouting, and pointing to the Causeway Heights with his sword. Lord Cardigan, not realizing what Nolan was endeavouring to convey, regarded this as an unwarrantable interference with the direction of the brigade; and Nolan was unable to give any further information, for the first shell, bursting just in front of his horse, tore away part of the brave Hussar's chest. His horse turning, went back, the dead body remaining for some distance erect in the saddle."

#### References:

- [1] Evelyn Wood, FM, VC, GCB, GCMG, "*From Midshipman to Field Marshal*": Volume 1: Methuen, London, 1896.
- [2] General Sir Evelyn Wood, "*The Crimea in 1854, and 1894*": Elibron Classics, 2003, (Reprint of original; Chapman and Hall, 1896.)
- [3] Lord George Paget, "*Light Cavalry Brigade in the Crimea*", pp.208-9, EP Publishing Ltd., East Ardsley, Wakefield, 1975. (Reprint of original; John Murray, 1881)
- [4] <http://www.andrewlownie.co.uk/books/trow.mei/hercules.shtml>
- [5] Antoine Fortuné de Brack, "*Avant-postes de cavalerie légère ... Suivi du manuel du service de la cavalerie légère en campagne par le Comte de la Roche-Aymon*.", Breda, 1834. (This book was reprinted in many editions (up to 1942) and had, in fact, already been translated (in India) into English as:- "*Advance Posts of Light Cavalry. Recollections ...*" With plates. Translated from the second Paris edition of 1844, by Major Peter James Begbie : Reuben Twig.